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ABSTRACT

Writers who double back to alter diction and syntax change their understanding of what it is they are saying, thereby clarifying their understanding and enhancing the discovery of new ideas. Revision, when taken this way, is often a form of invention. The difficulty in teaching revision is that writing has mistakenly been regarded as a linear activity, and the unity of the essay has been taught with a vertically linear paradigm that moves from subtopic to subtopic. The outline is the symbol of the reality of the essay and may be formulated through any combination of prewriting activities. One way is through oral feedback on the student's ideas or topic. Another method of attacking the traditional outline is, first, to introduce a visual structure that invites employing the "topic" during the planning stage and, second, to allow conferencing during the beginning stages of actual writing. Students are given a four-page handout that provides the traditional outline, a visual portrayal of the new paradigm with a section representing the interaction between teacher and student, a blank revision worksheet, and a representation of the work that is done at the instructor's desk during conferencing. In changing the paradigm of the outline, teachers can move students from a rudimentary mind set into the realm of formal logic. (HOD)

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Rhetorical Invention: Implications for Rewriting

Broadly speaking, revision is of two sorts: intensive, ongoing revision, which occurs from sentence to sentence, and, second, rewriting, proofreading and editing when the work is completed. Although invention may occur during both kinds of revision, this paper is concerned with invention as it occurs in revision while moving from sentence to sentence and even clause to clause during the act of writing. My interest is in developing a theory of revision, specifically, one that opens the way to teaching revision techniques that enhance invention while writing exposition or argumentation. My interest has focused on these two types of writing because most of the work done in recent years with invention has been concerned with discovery procedures for writing description and personal experience. The writers I have in mind are college students.

One of the current theories on revision--that by Professor Nancy Sommers, in the December 1980 issue of College Composition and Communication--addresses the interaction of mental activities that transpire when writers revise. Professor Sommers refutes the view that writing is linear--a view which she calls "metaphors of linear growth, conception--incubation--production," as well as the relationship between writing. She urges instead "the recursive shaping of thought by language"¹--a conception that accounts for the activity of revision during the process of writing.

By extension, I suggest that writers who double back to alter diction and syntax change their understanding of what it is they are saying, thereby clarifying their understanding, and enhancing the discovery of new ideas. Revision, when taken this way, is often a form of invention.

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For the last six months I have been working with students to find a practical technique to incorporate revision into the writing process. I will return to the specifics of the method I employ in the classroom, but I will explain first the underlying theory that supports it. In part, it agrees with the theory of organicism advanced by Sommers, but my interest arose some time ago from a point that Professor Frank D'Angelo makes in A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric, and this point, too is related to linearity. D'Angelo points out that the classical topics have a heuristic function. For example, classification, besides being an ordering method, is also a source of knowledge. According to D'Angelo's theory, "there is a pattern of conceptualizing in the brain based upon the structures of reality"--and in rhetoric, "these patterns of discourse we call 'conceptual patterns of discourse' because they relate to the operational activities of conceptualizing."² Further, D'Angelo postulates that there may be an isomorphic relationship between the patterns of operation in the human brain and the topoi as given to us by Aristotle and his descendents.³ Rhetoricians and others probably have not discovered all of the rhetorical paradigms that correspond to perceptions of reality, but the conditioning by the modes of thought given to us by Western Civilization have to some extent shaped our structures of thought. This near one-to-one relationship between the mental paradigms and the resulting perceptions of reality may limit the boundaries of creativity, but it also offers an ordering process that can be cultivated in beginning writers.

The structure that writers normally use to represent the essay is the outline. This paradigm may result from brainstorming and free writing or from analysis of the thesis; but in either case the structure of reality is

represented by a vertical linearity that moves down the page from thesis to subtopics to conclusion. This atomistic representation of reality quite naturally culminates with a fragmented essay which in outline form is described as thesis/subtopics 1-2-3/conclusion. This structure, of course, is better than no structure; the outline enables the writer to develop a sequential essay that moves from introduction to body to conclusion.

The outline, I repeat, results from traditional training in writing, but ~~can~~ also be produced by emotive techniques. In the latter case several theories, such as that suggested by Janice Lauer, support the principle that prewriting releases inhibitions and spawns creativity. The writer may get a topic organized by outlining and then writing out the subtopics into paragraphs, ignoring peripheral matters such as diction and syntax. These theories emphasize the importance of getting something down on paper. Even Peter Elbow, who urges us to jump in and write furiously, argues that later drafts should develop from an outline of points distilled from earlier drafts.

In my view, these approaches are wasteful, both in time and effort. The problem is the same as the one that emerges with traditional writing theory. In either case students resist changing a manuscript more than superficially once it is written. Even if written as a trial run, ideas, once stated, are writ in stone. Having stated the supporting arguments for a thesis, writers seem to have nothing more to say on the subject.

The difficulty in teaching revision, then, is not only that we have mistakenly regarded writing as a linear activity, as Sommers points out. Additionally, we have taught the unity of the essay with a vertically linear paradigm that moves from subtopic to subtopic. This structure is flawed by the presumption that ideas are unrelated segments. Such writing

is atomistic; it moves from point to point as if there were no relation between subtopics. This is the isomorphic paradigm that students are given as a guide to construct an essay.

The solution to the problem of revision during the act of writing, then, involves two factors: 1) we must encourage invention during the act of writing by encouraging revision to occur during that process. (This approaches writing as an organic process rather than as a linear activity.) And, second, we must find ways to break down the vertical linearity that represents the structure of the essay as a movement down the outline from subtopic to subtopic. To state that another way, we must find an occasion during the writing process to prod writers into new areas of investigation in order to sound out new possibilities before the rough draft is completed.

Several teacher/scholars of writing have worked on the problem of stimulating new directions of investigation during the act of writing. The work of Charles Duke has instigated activities of this sort. Duke's method is to start writers into a free-writing exercise; after 10 or 15 minutes, he interrupts the class and introduces a heuristic, which students deal with before returning to their composition. The heuristic may be something like this: "Now read what you have written and look for something that surprises you, something that you didn't expect to appear in your essay. Focus upon that and develop that idea in your essay." This procedure gives focus to one part of the essay and provides a topic that many students may not have considered developing fully. In part, this method engenders both structure and invention.

Some months ago, I participated in such an experiment, and I found that the problems with this procedure are greater than the advantages. For instance,

some writers would no doubt do better to follow through on the ideas they have developed on their own. Secondly, the whole class is interrupted simultaneously, regardless of how much writing each person has completed.

A second approach, suggested by Professor Aviva Freedman, in the Spring 1980 issue of English in Education, proposes a plan for teaching revision in a Writing Tutorial Service. Her research indicated that "the writing of 53% of our students was characterized by faults in logic, poor development of ideas, and lack of coherence. In all, over 90% of the students had either prewriting or organizing problems."⁴ Freedman also attacks the principle of linearity as "naive and dangerous" (p. 5), and asserts that the nature of writing is recursive (p. 5).

Freedman's method of assisting students to develop intelligent, logically sound essays is through a tutorial system in which the teacher interacts "with the students . . . while they are composing" (p. 4). I will do violence to her essay if I attempt to summarize it here, but 3 points are noteworthy: 1) the problems college student writers have, whether freshmen or seniors, consist largely of developing ideas beyond simple assertions; 2) students discover ideas during the act of writing; and, 3) students expand their understanding of their topic partly through interaction with a tutor (pp. 3-5).

Although most of us do not enjoy a schedule that permits us to tutor our writers through the entire composition, Freedman provides some clues about how we can change the paradigm into a recursive pattern. Until someone finds something better, the outline will no doubt remain the symbol of the reality of the essay. The outline may be formulated through any combination of prewriting activities. One way is through oral feedback on the student's ideas or topic. Although teachers may participate in class discussions of

a topic, either before or after small group discussions, normally time limitations preclude individual conferences.

Once students have an outline completed, however, teachers can and should arrange conferences in order to break the traditional paradigm and to develop new habits in analyzing the topic. After a number of trial experiments, I came upon a technique which I have found capable of changing the visual construct symbolized by the formal outline. It can transform a simple 3-point outline (which often produces the 5-paragraph essay) into an essay that has the complexity and depth that we look for in college writing. More important, however, is the fact that in changing the paradigm, we can move students from a rudimentary mind set into the realm of formal logic. I concede that I have not compiled enough data to prove this statistically, but, in practice, what I have seen indicates that changing the paradigm changes the thought process of beginning writers.

Before discussing the worksheet, I want to make a disclaimer. The outline, per se, is not necessarily a destructive force. As a means of analysis, it can be very useful. For instance, the first reading in Corbett's text Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, entitled "On Not Prosecuting Civil Disobedience," by Ronald Dworkin, is a very complex essay. At the end of the essay Corbett reduces it to an outline consisting of nine points plus an introduction and conclusion. D'Angelo, too, produces a paradigmatic structure, which is a form of text paraphrase or outline. Clearly, a very complex essay can be represented by a bare-bones structure. The point, then, is that a simple 5-point outline does not necessarily result in a simple-minded essay.

However, in both of these cases, Corbett and D'Angelo have started with a product and worked in reverse back to the outline. It does not follow that

if one starts with the outline that a complex essay will grow out of it.

It is for this very reason, I think, that the outline continues to be a controversial concept. Many writers say they cannot work from an outline, and I have known teachers who refuse to teach it. For many writers the outline is a constricting document that tends to predict the outcome of the essay.

My method of attacking the traditional outline is, first, to introduce a visual structure that invites employing the topoi during the planning stage. Second, I allow conferencing during the beginning stages of actual writing. Now--if we procede through the handout, I can add some details.

The first page of the handout is the traditional outline. It moves down the page and tells beginning writers to start a new paragraph each time they begin a new point. The second page is a visual portrayal of the new paradigm. The section at the right side of the page represents the interaction between teacher and student. The conference should have a minimal goal of considering relationships between Topics A and B. However, the teacher can draw upon the remaining topics in the outline to look for larger relationships which run through the whole essay. In such cases, the student may want to go back and write a new thesis statement that creates a thematic thread that runs through the whole essay.

When students work on Topic C, they should be looking back to the topics already covered and forward to the remaining topics. Out of this interplay, they can and do invent more topics, more qualifications, more clarifications, and more detail.

The third page is a blank revision worksheet. This is the form that students begin with as they prewrite. The fourth page represents the kind of

work that is done at the instructor's desk during conferencing.

Page four is a model of a worksheet after the conference is over. The typed outline represents the writing that the student does before and after the conference. The handwritten material represents the suggestions that the student and instructor agree upon during the conference. In this case, Topic A argues that the bumper sticker policy cheats the students; Topic B argues that students could have more parking if the university would simply expand the parking lots. The instructor noticed the limited point of view: the question for the student: Who else is affected by this besides students? Specifically, which students are affected? Within 3 minutes the student expanded Topic B by finding the way to expand parking lots, and, with another question, "How will the university deal with the expense?"--the student came up with the idea of purchasing lots on the edge of town. The shuttle service followed naturally, which he added to his idea of high rise parking and amplified with the idea that signs could be posted at the edge of town when the high rise parking lot was full.

In time blocks the class hours break down this way: Day one--the hour begins with a class assignment (preferably 4 or 5 topics and an open end for those who cannot work with any of them.) The instructor directs discussion for 10 or 15 minutes, then hands out the worksheet, breaks the class into small groups and allows 30 minutes for prewriting. They return to a class discussion for the remaining 10 minutes. Allow overnight incubation. Day 2: students fill in the thesis, topics A and B, "Remaining Topics" and conclusion. Begin writing. When students complete topics A and B, or whenever someone gets stuck, she or he has a 3-minute conference at the instructor's desk. Some students will already have the worksheet filled out and some will have already started writing.

The conference should be student-oriented. That is, the teacher reads the paragraphs and asks the student to explain the strategy set down on the worksheet. The teacher should look for relationships. What do these two topics have in common? How do they differ? Do you have any personal experience to illustrate this topic? Illustration most frequently expands the essay, but cause/effect will often be an obvious means of amplification in argumentative essays.

As this model illustrates, the exercise spreads down the page. The writing of Topic C leads to amplification in Topic D. I am not sure why, but I think the visual effect is relevant. I also believe the expansion of Topic A or B triggers the writer's mind into new methods of investigation when moving to topic D. The conference over topic C is a generative structural link. Something happens that moves students into new strategies of argument.

Students can complete the essay that night on their own time. The complex and lonely task of putting it all together, editing and typing is still hard work, but the result is a much more mature piece of writing. One of the virtues of this method is that it reduces the amount of time that students seem to require to produce superior work.

There are also some disadvantages. Some students will not get a chance to have a conference because of time limitations. This is offset in part, however, because more students will be encouraged to visit during office hours. The slowest students are the ones who get abandoned most often. My most ambitious students are the first ones to my desk. These students will try to monopolize the hour, and they may have to be cut short--which tends to leave me with a sense of dissatisfaction.

But most of the returns are positive. I don't use this device all

term. After the third essay, I make the work sheet optional. A few students rely upon it, but most of them pass it up.

In concluding, I will mention that this study needs to be examined under experimental conditions--with a control group, several experimental classes and a panel of readers. Particularly, I would like to contrast a class that uses the work sheet all term with a class that uses it 3 weeks. My present stage of work is metarhetorical in nature. When I get measurable results in experimentation, I will look for another forum to present my data.

Endnotes

¹ Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers," College Composition, 31, No. 4 (Dec. 1980), 378-388.

² Frank J. D'Angelo, A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric (Cambridge, Mass: Winthrop, 1975), p. 15.

³ Mr. Duke introduced this method at an NCTE Conference Workshop at Cincinnati, Ohio (Nov. 29, 1980).

⁴ Aviva Freedman, "During Not After: An Untraditional Approach to the Teaching of Writing," English in Education 14, No. 1 (Spring 1980), 2-9.

The Traditional Outline: Vertical Linearity; Atomistic

Thesis

Our Campus Can (and Should) Produce more
Parking Places

↓
Topic A

Revise Bumper Sticker Policy

↓
Topic B

Expand Parking Lots

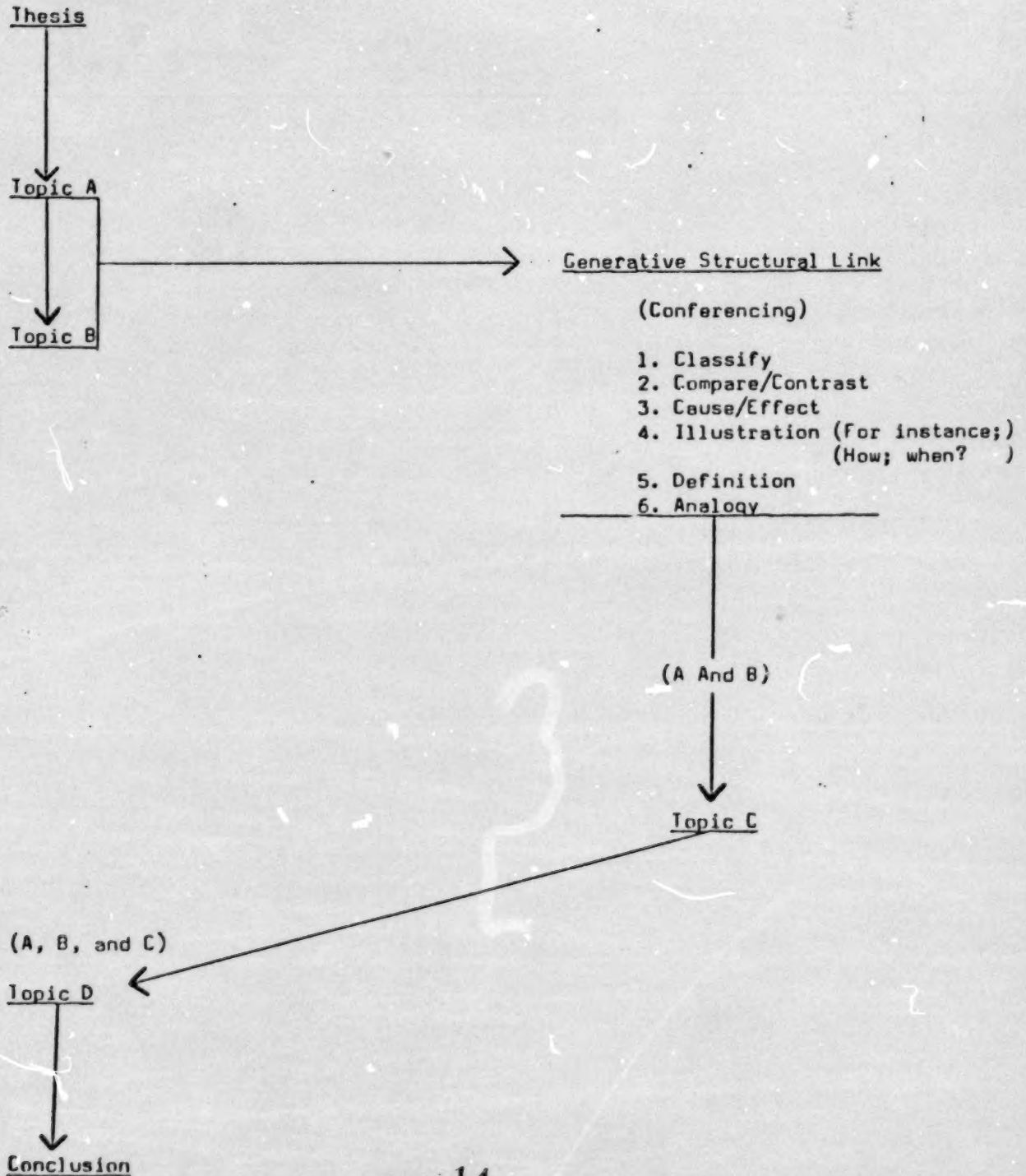
↓
Topic C

Build High Rise Parking lots

↓
Conclusion

All Students Should Be Allowed To Have Cars

A Structural Paradigm: The Recursive Outline



WORKSHEET

I. Thesis

1. Classify
2. Compare/Contrast
3. Cause/Effect
4. Illustration (For instance;
(How; When?)
5. Definition
6. Analogy

II. Topic ACONFERENCETopic CIII. Topic BIV. Remaining Topics

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Topic DConclusion

WORKSHEET

I. Thesis

Our campus can (and should) produce more parking places.

1. Classify
2. Compare/Contrast
3. Cause/Effect
4. Illustration (For instance (How; When?))
5. Definition
6. Analogy

II. Topic A

Revise bumper sticker policy

Conference Topic C

III. Topic B

Expand parking lots;

Purchase more property

Concerns:

TP3 Administrators, maintenance, trucks, Independents

IV. Remaining Topics

~~1. purchase more property~~

TP6 2. high rise parking

3.

4.

Topic D

Shuttle bus service

par. 5 - Economy--cheaper parking lots at edge of town.

Conclusion

All students should be allowed to have cars on campus; this will be possible if I am elected.

par. 7 - Post signs at edge of town when high rise is full.